

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-20

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NSAE-00 NSC-10 PA-03 RSC-01 PRS-01 SS-15 USIA-15

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C O N F I D E N T I A L PANAMA 4120

EO 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR PN

SUBJ: LOCAL ENVIRONMENT AND TREATY NEGOTIATIONS

REF: A) PANAMA 3689; B) PANAMA 3700; C) PANAMA 4013

SUMMARY. CONTRARY TO SIGNS GIVEN WEEKS AGO, PANAMANIAN PRESS DID NOT CONTINUE ATTACKS ON U.S. COVERAGE OF CANAL TREATY MATTERS HAS REMAINED MODERATE AND AFTER BRIEF FLURRY OF CRITICISM, PRESS COVERAGE OF SQUATTER PROBLEM HAS SUBSIDED. MODERATE TREATMENT OF US BY GOP-CONTROLLED PRESS IN RECENT WEEKS IS PROBABLY ATTRIBUTABLE TO TORRIJOS DESIRE TO AVOID PROBLEMS WITH US FOR TIME BEING. END SUMMARY.

1. PRESS COVERAGE OF CANAL TREATY NEGOTIATIONS HAS REMAINED LOW KEY SINCE JULY 12 WHEN IT WAS SHOWING SIGNS OF ENTERING CYCLE OF INTENSE PRESS COVERAGE ON TREATY MATTERS. THIS HAS NOT HAPPENED. THERE WAS A FLARE UP OF CRITICISM OF U.S. ARMY'S ATTEMPTS TO EVICT SQUATTERS, BUT SINCE JULY 26 PRESS HAS NOT DWELLED ON THIS ISSUE PERHAPS DUE TO GOP DESIRE TO AVOID CONFRONTATION WITH THE US ON THIS ISSUE (SEE HZP13005, JULY 31).

2. COVERAGE OF CANAL RELATIONSHIP HAS BEEN NOTICEABLY RESTRAINED.

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GOVERNOR PARKER'S TESTIMONY BEFORE HOUSE PANCANAL SUBCOMMITTEE

RECEIVED HEADLINES TWICE. HIS TESTIMONY CONCERNING CANAL USAGE WAS CITED AND ON JULY 23, GOVERNOR'S COMMENTS AND THOSE OF SHIPPING INTERESTS INDICATING LITTLE SUPPORT IN US FOR SEA-LEVEL CANAL WERE NOTED, BUT RECEIVED LITTLE COMMENTARY.

3. SPEAKERS FROM FOREIGN MINISTRY MADE APPEARANCES ONCE EACH WEEK DURING JULY AT GOP-SPONSORED SEMINARS OF GENERAL INFORMATION FOR PUBLIC EMPLOYEES TO DISCUSS CANAL PROBLEM. APART FROM TORRIJOS'S APPEARANCE (REF B), THE ONLY SUBSEQUENT STATEMENT ON CANAL ISSUE GIVEN PROMINENT COVERAGE WAS TREATY NEGOTIATOR LOPEZ GUEVARA'S DISCOURSE CONCERNING HISTORICAL AND LEGAL BACKGROUND OF CANAL RELATIONSHIP. HE REPEATED PANAMANIAN POSITION THAT "WHATEVER NEW CONSTRUCTION THE U.S. DESIRES IN CANAL ZONE NEEDS AUTHORIZATION OF SOVEREIGN COUNTRY... (PANAMA)" AND SAID THAT "U.S. FUNCTIONAIRES FORGET THAT WE LIVE IN AN ERA OF DECOLONIZATION, THAT THEY CANNOT ACT WITHIN THE CANAL ZONE WITH THE LIBERTY THEY WANT TO ARROGATE TO THEMSELVES..."

4. AGAIN ON JULY 28 TREATY NEGOTIATIONS GOT FRONT PAGE TREATMENT WITH LA ESTRELLA'S REPORT OF PANAMA'S AMBASSADOR TO UN AQUILINO BOYD'S PRESS INTERVIEW JULY 27. HE REPORTEDLY SAID HIS GOVERNMENT WAS AWAITING "CONCRETE PROOF OF GOOD FAITH OF THE US IN THE PROGRESS OF THE NEGOTIATIONS FOR A NEW CANAL TREATY, BEFORE ADOPTING A DECISION WHETHER OR NOT IT IS CONVENIENT TO PRESENT THE CASE IN THE 28TH GENERAL ASSEMBLY" AND THAT IF ISSUE WOULD GO TO UNGA THE GREAT MAJORITY OF THE 135 UN MEMBERS WOULD APPROVE THE SAME RESOLUTION THAT WAS VETOED BY US DURING SECURITY COUNCIL SESSION. BOYD EXPRESSED A PREFERENCE FOR BILATERAL NEGOTIATIONS, SAYING THAT "AS SOONER OR LATER THIS PROBLEM OF THE US PRESENCE IN THE CANAL ZONE WILL HAVE TO BE RESOLVED BY BILATERAL NEGOTIATIONS, WE PREFER TO ARRIVE AT IT IN A JUST FORM AS SOON AS POSSIBLE." PANAMA, HE SAID, WAS AWAITING U.S. RESPONSE TO TWO OFFICIAL DOCUMENTS: A MAY 7 LETTER TO AMBASSADOR ANDERSON, AND THE LETTER DELIVERED TO SECRETARY OF STATE ROGERS BY FOREIGN MINISTER TACK IN BUENOS AIRES.

5. BOYD NOTED U.S. NEGOTIATING GROUP IS WAITING FOR NEW CHIEF, AS AMBASSADOR BUNKER'S APPOINTMENT WAS NOT YET CONFIRMED.
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CONCERNING BUNKER HE SAID, "MY PERSONAL OBSERVATION IS THAT WHILE AMBASSADOR BUNKER WAS IN VIETNAM, THE U.S. SPENT ABOUT \$100 MILLION AND WITHDREW FROM INDOCHINA MORE THAN 1/2 MILLION SOLDIERS. IF BUNKER APPLIES THE SAME PHILOSOPHY TO PANAMA, I THINK WE CAN ACHIEVE AGREEMENT VERY SOON. AS YOU KNOW, THE BASIC PANAMANIAN OPINION CONSISTS OF TWO NON-NEGOTIABLE POINTS: FIRST, THE ABROGATION OF THE TREATY OF 1903, AND SECOND, REGAINING OF EFFECTIVE SOVEREIGNTY BY PANAMA OVER ALL OUR

TERRITORY, INCLUDING THE CANAL ZONE."

6. LA ESTRELLA AND CRITICA FRONT PAGES AUGUST 3, CARRY STORIES (AP AND EFE) OF AMBASSADOR BUNKER'S NOMINATION AS AMBASSADOR AT LARGE. LA ESTRELLA STORY IS STRAIGHT AP RELEASE, MENTIONING REPORTS THAT BUNKER WAS ASKED BY PRESIDENT NIXON TO BE CHIEF OF TREATY NEGOTIATING TEAM, ADDING THESE REPORTS REMAIN UNCONFIRMED. CRITICA EFE ARTICLE STATES "APPARENTLY ONE OF HIS FIRST MISSIONS WILL BE REINITIATE CONVERSATIONS ABOUT THE PANAMA CANAL WITH...(GOP)." ARTICLE COMMENTS FAVORABLY ON BUNKER'S REPUTATION AS "ABLE DIPLOMAT". REMAINDER OF ARTICLE WAS REHASH OF BACKGROUND.

7. COMMENT. PRESS HAS REMAINED RELATIVELY MODERATE IN HANDLING TREATY NEGOTIATIONS AND U.S.-PANAMANIAN RELATIONS DURING PAST THREE WEEKS, AND IS PROBABLY INDICATIVE OF TORRIJOS' DESIRE TO KEEP SITUATION QUIET. THERE WAS POSSIBILITY THAT HE MIGHT CHOOSE TO DISTRACT PUBLIC'S ATTENTION FROM THE CRISIS IN CHIRIQUI BY ALLOWING PRESS ATTACKS ON U.S. CONCERNING THE SQUATTERS OR TREATY MATTERS. BUT THIS HAS NOT HAPPENED. END COMMENT.

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